

A Garden Through Time

Stop #1

Narrator: Welcome! My name is Matthew and I will be your guide for the duration of this walk. On it, we will trace the boundaries of the Leeds Zoological and Botanical Gardens, which existed in Headingley between 1840 and 1858. Later on, I'll tell you more about the history of the Gardens, but before we start, let's take a moment to find somewhere safe to stand.

Hopefully, you are standing in front of Burley Park Station. To your left, there should be a small car park, and to your right, a row of plastic recycling bins. Directly ahead is Chapel Lane and, beyond it, an old stone wall. Just make sure that you're out of the way of people coming out of the station. It can be busy here – especially at rush hour.

The station is a useful stop for those wishing to make their way into and out of the city centre, whilst avoiding the traffic on the busy main roads. It is also a minor celebrity as it occasionally plays the role of Hotton Station in the soap opera Emmerdale.

Burley Park opened in 1988, but it is by no means the first station to stand upon this site. In 1849, the Leeds & Thirsk railway company opened the Harrogate to Leeds line, which connected the area not only with the city but also to Ripon and Thirsk. Headingley Station was opened as part of this development and it still stands today. What is less well known is that a second station was later added. This was the Royal Gardens halt. It stood at the Southern end of the Gardens at around about the spot where you are standing now.

At the time of its opening, the lease for the land on which the Gardens stood was owned by a Mr Henry Cowper Marshall. Mr Marshall was a local industrialist and was also, by coincidence, an influential investor in the Leeds & Thirsk Railway Company.

The Royal Gardens halt was shut down in 1857, shortly before the Gardens themselves were closed for good, but during its short existence, the station provided many hundreds of people with access to this most exciting of attractions.

Here is the text of a local press advertisement, produced by Thomas Clapham, who managed the Gardens during their final decade of existence.

Voice #1: "Leeds Royal Gardens

These Magnificent and Princely Gardens are the most beautiful in England. In addition to the talented band, there are many other attractions; - they include near 25 acres of Ground, presenting a rich and varied prospect of graceful hill and dale, - are most beautifully ornamented with lawns, walks,

lakes, trees, plants, flowers; aquatic and curious birds; costly statues; and other curiosities.

Open every day.

Charges for admission, - on Gala days, 3d. or 6d – other weekdays and on Sundays, 2d. each. Schools admitted at low rates, by special agreement.

Regular trains go from the Wellington Station, Leeds, to the Gardens and back, several times every afternoon, which are advertised in the Leeds Northern time bills. Fares to the gardens and back, 3d. third class, and 6d. first. Passengers can stop at the Gardens every afternoon from Ripon, Harrogate, Arthington, and all other places on the line.

There are also omnibuses from Leeds to the Gardens and back, every hour.

The Gardens are only one mile and a half from Leeds; persons preferring to walk will enjoy the most beautiful scenery. Tea and other excellent refreshments can be had in the Gardens for small or large numbers without previous notice.”

Narrator: How did you get to the Gardens today? By train? By foot? Or by omnibus?

Now. Take a moment to properly inspect the wall straight ahead of you. This is part of the boundary wall of the Gardens. Of course, it has been altered since it was first erected. It has seen a lot of work over the years. There are at least two different kinds of cement in between the old and weathered stones. On the left-hand side, before it curves around the corner, is a section of smaller stones, in between two large pillars. This was once the station entrance, where visitors, arriving by train, gained access to the grounds.

It is time to get moving. Ahead of you, Chapel Lane curves away in two directions. To the right are the dull grey hindquarters of the Co-Op building, that fronts onto Cardigan Road and to the left are a row of smart, suburban houses, semi-detached, with whitewashed upper stories. Carefully cross the road and take the left-hand fork, keeping the stones of the wall on your righthand side. Keep walking, until you reach the first turning on your right. Stop at the back of Our Lady of Lourdes. This is the large, redbrick building on the corner of Newport Road.

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Stop #2:

Narrator: Let's stop here for a while. Here is the church of our Lady of Lourdes. The church was built in the nineteen twenties as a chapel of ease – a place of worship for those who were unable to get to Sacred Heart - the Catholic Parish Church on Burley Road. It opened its doors in 1930. It's hard to imagine that the site of this church was once a carefully cultivated public Gardens but were we to travel back in time to 1830, there would have been no Gardens here at all. At that time, the land was in private ownership and consisted of a number of open fields.

In 1836 the idea of opening a Public Gardens in Leeds was mooted at a meeting of the Leeds Floral Society. A letter was read out from a Mr Edwin Edison, suggesting that Leeds was in want of such an establishment. The suggestion was pooh-poohed by the chairman of the society, but minutes of the meeting provoked much correspondence in the local press.

Voice #2: To the editor of the Intelligencer

Sir, - Allow me through the medium of your paper to intreat Mr. Edison and his colleagues not to slacken their zeal respecting the establishment of Botanical and Zoological Gardens, because the Chairman of the Leeds Horticultural Society expressed a fear that "while Leeds clung to its smoke, instead of burning it, the attempt to establish a Botanical Garden would necessarily fail".

For I can assure them there is more than one very eligible site, equal if not superior to the one at Sheffield, which is generally allowed to be without fault. Leeds, I believe, established the first provincial Horticultural Society, which for some time flourished, but I am ashamed to say that the taste for public horticultural recreations has of late become almost extinct. But I think a little spark again presents itself, therefore I hope Leeds will come forward with energy and its wealth and fan it into a flame. Let us be jealous of Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and many other towns not less smoky than Leeds, and the zeal and interest they take in promoting recreations, so rational, so healthy, and so delightful; and let us be determined that a stone shall not remain unturned in order that Leeds may again stand unrivalled in this most interesting of causes. G.A.

Narrator: The writer of this letter, G.A., was not the only enthusiastic local. Further correspondence was received, and eventually a committee was formed for the purpose of selling shares and raising capital for the purchase of land and the laying out of public gardens. Although the idea for the gardens had first been mooted at the Floral Society, the minutes of a meeting of the Gardens Committee reveal that:

Voice #3: "In the Leeds Gardens, Botany and Horticulture will march hand in hand with Zoology."

Narrator: By 1837, the plans for the Gardens were well advanced and money had been raised. It was barely half of the full amount required but it was enough for the committee to start to think about a design. The commission for designing the Gardens was advertised in the local press and seventeen potential plans were received. The contract was won by William Billington, a Wakefield engineer, and Edward Davies, a landscape gardener. The drawing submitted was very grand and full of beautiful buildings but due to ongoing cashflow issues, it is likely that much of the initial plan was never fully realised.

It is time to move on. Carefully cross over Newport Road and carry on walking North up Chapel Lane. As you go, take a moment to consider the trees and plants that you can see. There are a number of fine specimens waving their branches above the top of the boundary wall. How old are those trees? How long have they been there? Fifty years? Sixty? Longer perhaps? Have any of them been here long enough to remember the Gardens? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Perhaps the trees you can see today have sprung from the seeds of those that were planted when the site was first laid out. The boundary wall is not the only remnant of the Gardens left behind.

Keep walking until you reach the entrance to the flats at Bearpit Gardens. You'll recognise the spot. There's a gap in the wall and beyond it a little birdhouse on the lawn in front of a sign bearing the name of the development.

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Stop #3

Narrator: Here we are, outside Bearpit Gardens. Let's pause here for a moment. As you do, just be aware that the Gardens are really a housing development and that the entrance is in use by residents. The garden's name is a clue to the land's former life as a kind of suburban zoo. If you were to enter the gardens and keep on walking forwards, you would emerge eventually onto Cardigan Road. You would come out opposite the little stone folly that now stands at the Road's edge. The folly was once an actual bear pit, home to at least two different bears over the course of the Garden's existence. The first, "a very well-bred, decently behaved brown bear", arrived shortly after the gardens were first opened. According to a newspaper article from 1841, his neighbours included "a pair of monkeys, a racoon, four guinea pigs, an owl, a peacock and two parrots," while in 1844 he was joined by a new arrival.

Voice #4: Leeds Times 6th July 1844. Zoological Gardens – During the present week, an alligator has been presented to the proprietors of the Leeds Zoological Gardens, by Mr. George Wood, a gentleman recently returned from America. The alligator was captured within a few miles of Charleston, South Carolina, in the latter part of May last, and brought to England by Mr. Wood. It is one year old, and measures about four feet two inches in length, is very healthy and lively, and in all respects, a remarkably fine specimen.

Narrator: How long the alligator remained at the Gardens is hard to say. We're going to hear now from Pauline Mayers, a local artist and choreographer. Pauline has been thinking about the nature of zoos and their role in the age of Empire

Pauline: Hello. For the next few minutes as you stand outside of the Bearpit Gardens, I would like to share with you some thoughts. As you listen to the sound of my voice, do take the opportunity to look around you, notice the trees, there may even be cars that line the streets.

I would like to take this moment to introduce myself. My name is Pauline. I'm a choreographer and I make theatre. I'm interested in reframing spaces and histories through experiential art to help audiences re-examine shared histories and enable lost voices to be heard.

I am both the researcher and the researched, and through the process of collaboration I seek to create experiences mixing the autobiographical with history and the present day. Where there are no lines between artist and audience, where the audience is not merely a passive observer, but is an active participant.

I've lived in Leeds for some time now, yet this city never ceases to amaze me.

So, I'm curious. As you look around you in this year of 2020, a year full of surprise, of viruses and pandemics, of protest and demonstration, where Britain is in flux and the world is interrupted what was Leeds like in the past?

Let's go back to 1840 when the Leeds Botanical and Zoological Gardens first opened to the public. Chameleon-like in its presentation, the ground on which you now stand was about 'the promotion of the sciences of zoology and botany'. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew opened in the same year. Its current mission? 'To unlock the potential of plants and fungi, through the power of scientific discovery and research'.

But what does this mean? Leeds and Kew had collections of bodies and plants, specimens taken from around the world to tell a story of nature and wonder. On this ground Britain's image was built.

"The British empire where the sun never sets..."

The zoo and gardens is the story of success and riches and empire which morphs and multiplies as each flora and fauna is added to this menagerie of exotica. The Leeds Botanical and Zoological Gardens was a past narrator of this story, a story Britain continues to tell itself to this day.

I think of the galas that happened in the Gardens to draw in the crowds. The pomp of the bands, the dancing in the tents, the trumpets and the horsemen and the many fireworks displays, with admission to the grounds going from the sum of six pence. All scenes that could have appeared as Queen Victoria married Prince Albert. The people of Leeds and further afield enjoying a good day out.

To mark such events, perhaps a letter was sent from a spectator in Leeds to a loved one elsewhere using the Penny Black, the world's first postage stamp.

Then I think of the flora and fauna. Where did they come from?

Did specimens come from New Zealand settled by the Maori, the indigenous peoples who arrived there from Polynesia between 1200 and 1300 AD. 1840 was the year the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, a treaty of protection between the Maori and the British, where the British deliberately underplayed its authority over the lands, and at that moment those lands became stolen.

Or maybe specimens came from China, where the opium wars were fought. China against the British Empire who made profits from the illegal trade in opium, a highly addictive drug from far afield into China. According to the documentary, "Empires of Dirt" the British trade in opium meant that by 1840, 3,500 metric tons of opium was shipped by the British into China causing addiction and devastation, on a scale never seen before or since.

And so, to Charleston, South Carolina in America where thousands of enslaved Africans were brought through the Middle Passage. South Carolina where the alligator was caught. 1844 was the year Mr. George Wood, a proprietor of the Leeds Zoological Gardens brought the specimen back from those shores.

To Crystal Palace built from the proceeds of empire to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. The first of its kind, the exhibition made clear to the world Britain's role as an industrial leader. With exhibits from across the empire, six million attended, including Darwin, Marx and Faraday. The profits from the Exhibition set up the Victoria and Albert, Science and Natural History Museums in London.

Empire was embodied by the famed explorer David Livingstone in 1855. He undertook missions of discovery for British knowledge to the African Continent. Mosi-oa-Tunya—"The Smoke That Thunders" in Zambia was renamed Victoria Falls by Livingstone claimed for the Queen and his exploits formed the basis for the Scramble for Africa in 1884.

Flora and fauna.

Zoo and garden.

Leeds and Kew.

Britain and its empire.

Narrator: It is time to move on. Keep walking north up Chapel Lane. Keep going. until you reach the junction with Spring Road on your right. The wall of the Gardens takes a sharp right turn here. Turn right too, and then cross Spring Road, until you are stood by the rusty iron railings of Sparrow Park.

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Stop #4

Narrator: Here we are by Sparrow Park. Stand with your back to the railings, and look ahead, across Spring Road. The wall before you contained the principal entrance to the Gardens. Today, the remains are Grade Two listed. Originally, the wall ran in a continuous line, straight across what is now Cardigan Road, to your left. Spring Road, which runs down from Headingley Lane, was the carriage drive for the Gardens, bringing in visitors travelling by road. Judging from the original plans, the main entrance was built on a grand scale, though this is now long gone, presumably demolished when Cardigan Road was built in the late 1860s.

When the Gardens were open, they played host to a number of exciting events and gala days, many of which attracted large numbers of visitors. These included concerts, firework displays, temperance rallies, circus performances and *Son et Lumiere* extravaganzas.

It is pleasing to imagine the area where you are now stood as it might have been when one of these events was taking place. Perhaps there is a queue of people, waiting by the wall. Let's take a look at them. What are they wearing? Are they poor or wealthy? Is this their only day off in the week? Where have they come from to get here? And who have they come to see?

Voice #5: The Great Wizard of the North will perform his wonders on Monday evening at Leeds Zoological Gardens.

The last gala of the season will take place on Monday, August 22nd, for the benefit of the Great Wizard of the North, on which occasion he will give a grand display of his magic powers, which will be the last time he can perform in Leeds. Arrangements have been made, by which twenty thousand spectators can see his feats at once.

Grand scenes of Equestrianism will take place in the circle; the antipodean wonder will perform on the geometrical ladder; the admired tight rope dancer will appear; the ten Lancashire bell ringers will pour forth their "Merrie Peals." A quadrille band will be provided for "dancing on the green." The whole of this unparalleled entertainment will conclude with an Extraordinary Grand Display of Fireworks!!

The gates of the gardens will be thrown open at five o'clock, and the amusements will commence at six. Admission – Ladies and Gentlemen one shilling; working people, sixpence. The wizard's performance will commence about seven. *Leeds Intelligencer 20th Aug 1842*

Narrator: Clearly, there was a range of entertainments for the public to choose from at the gardens, although, to modern sensibilities, some of these events sound more exciting than others. Here, for example, is a review in the Leeds Times of an athletic performance by the celebrated Mountjoy.

Voice #6: Extraordinary Feat At The Zoological Gardens – On Thursday evening last, an extraordinary feat of pedestrianism was accomplished at the Leeds Zoological Gardens by the celebrated Mountjoy. On that evening, he ran one mile, walked one mile forwards and one backwards, trundled a hoop half a mile, wheeled a barrow half a mile, hopped on one leg two hundred yards, picked up forty eggs placed one yard apart, with his mouth, with his hands tied, and brought each egg in his mouth and deposited the whole in a bucket of water without breaking; ran five miles, walked one mile forwards, half a mile backwards, and leaped over one hundred hurdles (fifty with an egg in his mouth) being a distance of upwards of fourteen miles, and accomplished the whole in fifteen seconds more than two hours. The time in which the feat was to have been performed was two hours, and it would have been accomplished in less than that time had it not been for one or two casualties. The feat was performed on a grass plot on one side of the garden. At its conclusion, Mr Mountjoy, who was exceedingly fatigued, addressed a few words to the assembly, in which he hoped they were satisfied, and complained of the nature of the ground on which he had performed the feat, which had a considerable ascent. The hill he said was almost enough to ‘break his heart,’ and he would not perform the feat on the same ground again for £50. The assembly, which was an immense one, was evidently entirely satisfied with the performance. *Leeds Times 23rd July 1842*

Narrator: Time to move on now. Let’s get away from the busy pavement and the thronging crowd. Walk towards the bollards at the end of Spring Road and then step through the little gate into the fenced-off park to your left.



Stop #5

Narrator: Welcome. This is Sparrow Park, apparently so called because it is in common ownership and for many years it belonged to no-one but the sparrows. The story goes that when the Gardens closed, the land was sold off in parcels for development. This process began in 1869, and the big villas on either side of Cardigan Road were amongst the first houses to be built upon the site. Indeed, if you were to peer into the grounds of Cardigan House (the second building on the right if you walk down Cardigan Road from here), you might spot a circular stone flowerbed on the lawn, which is thought, at one time, to have been the base of one of the Gardens' fountains.

Spring Road and Chapel Lane were already in existence then and Cardigan Road was added in the late 1860s, to give access to the big new villas. When it was laid, it annexed off this little triangle of land. If there were ever any deeds to this tiny patch of earth, they were lost many years ago and it remained a no-man's land until the local council staked a claim to it in 2013. It is currently looked after and cared for by a local conservation group, The Friends of Sparrow Park.

Now you're here, why not take the weight off for a while? Find a seat on one of the benches and see what the park has to say for itself.

The Park: Come in. You are always welcome here. They have been calling me Sparrow Park for some time now, but that is not my name. That land opposite my little gate was called the Botanical Gardens when they built that wall of stone, and before that all of this was called the Bainbrigge Estate. Great men with names like de Lacy, Brudenell, Clapham, and Marshall, have walked where you walk and called me all sorts of things, but none of them knew my name. You can know my name. Sit on my bench and rest your back against my tree. You can feel my name under your feet on my earth. You can smell my name in the rain on my grass. You can hear my name in the wind in my leaves. You can see my name in the sunlight through my boughs. You can taste my name in the juice of my blackberries. My name is long, and old. My name is this place and this place is my name, and if you would know it, then I suggest you stay where you are, and listen to what I have to say.

Sparrow Park (which is not my name) is not supposed to be here. Of course, Sparrow Park could not be anywhere else but here, yet nonetheless here is not where Sparrow Park is supposed to be. Nothing is really supposed to be here. I am a place between places, a little bit of green between tarmac roads and stone walls, a ginnel with no end and no beginning. I sit, and I watch, and I listen, and I am left alone.

I watched as Mr. Marshall sold the Botanical Gardens to men in long black coats and tall black hats in the town hall. Every little part of the land was signed on to a piece of a paper and sold off. They all said the gardens weren't

making enough money; I thought the fact that money doesn't grow on trees was public knowledge. They said the gardens were not sustainable, though now people say that sustainability is that which is powered by water, and wind, and sunlight; to which I say: what could be more sustainable than a garden?

It seems all land has a bit of paper that says what it is and who owns it. All except Sparrow Park. I don't even know what my paper would say on it: 'Little triangle with Oak saplings and blackberry bushes. Ideal for bird boxes and a compost heap.' Now, I love having people take a moment and sit down in the shade of my trees, but it does feel like I'm all give and no take. My blackberries make fine jam and great fun, but what do I get back? Bottles of White Ace, needles, and now canisters of nos. Mr. Darwin has said that survival is down to the most fit, and I have worked very hard to be a good fit, thrust like the prow of a green, leafy boat into a sea of constant traffic; the last piece of wreckage of a great ship gone down beneath the waves of brick and mortar and tarmac.

Ah well, I moan, but I am still here. Mr. Clapham's gardens aren't gone either, of course. You'll see them if you look. Orchids and monkey puzzle trees, bright pinks and purples, sharp fronds and spiralling stalks: not what a gardener might call native to these lands. But they are native now. They have been here for over 150 years and they are not going anywhere now. It makes me laugh (you can hear my laughter, if you listen) to think of those men in the town hall. Here for such a short time, so confident, so brazen, so sure in the knowledge that they owned the land, and yet now their bodies lie in the land's embrace. I can remember the Normans, walking all over this land, saying how much it was worth and writing it all down on pieces of paper in their big book. They thought they owned me as well.

I hope you don't think I don't like people. I do have friends. People come and pick up litter, build benches, tend to my flowers, trim the branches of my trees, feed my birds. I like these people. They don't have long black coats and tall black hats. They don't have meetings in town halls to decide where people will live and trees will grow. Those people have large gardens all of their own, with high stone walls and locked gates. My garden only has a little fence, and my gate is always open.

Narrator: The time has come to leave the park behind. Step out of the gate and turn left towards the bollards. We are going to cross over Cardigan Road. The road runs almost directly through the middle of the site of the Botanical Gardens. Helpfully, there is a pedestrian crossing here.

When you reach the other side turn right and then swing left into Spring Road.

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Stop #6

Narrator: We are now standing in Spring Road, facing the rest of the Grade II listed wall, that once contained the main entrance to the Gardens. If you walk up the road a little way, you can see the same pattern of indentations in the stonework that were visible opposite Sparrow Park – although these now contain windows belonging to the red-brick house above. We are at the Northern end of the Gardens' boundary. From here, the boundary wall turned and ran South East in the direction of what is now Raven Road. You can see the direction the boundary took, by following the angle of the house's outside wall as it runs past the little garage on the left. The presence of Spring Bank Primary school prevents us from following the footprint of the grounds any further in this direction.

By 1839, building had commenced on the Gardens and a report in the Leeds Times describes it in the following terms.

Voice #7: The whole of the ground is enclosed by a wall of Meanwood grit stone on the South East and West sides, ten feet high; of Woodhouse stone and brick on the North side and of Meanwood grit stone and brick at the principal entrance. The North and North-West sides, which are fifteen feet high, are lined with brick on those sides having a South and South-Easterly aspect ... suitable for fruit trees. There are two ponds, one containing a surface of nearly one acre, and the other about half an acre. The walks are nearly all formed ...

The buildings erected and completed are the Burley entrance lodge at the South west corner occupied by the foreman. The cottage of porter's lodge, committee room and shed, at the North-West corner, adjoining the principal entrance and the propagating house ... *The Leeds Times, 10 August 1839*

Narrator: The construction of the gardens was well advanced by this point, but a crisis in funding arose the next year, which nearly led to the gardens failing to open altogether. A letter to the Leeds Times in February 1840, outlines both the crisis and the issue which lay at its heart.

Voice #8: We observe that a meeting of the proprietors of these gardens is to be held on Wednesday next, to consider a proposition for either selling or letting the premises. The reason assigned is, a deficiency of funds to carry forward the project. We rather think that there would have been plenty of money raised but for the resolution come to by the proprietors to close these gardens on Sundays – a resolution which induced the withdrawal of a large number of capitalists, who were anxious to afford the working classes (who have no other day at their disposal) an opportunity for recreation as well as themselves. However, be that as it may, it will be a disgrace to Leeds, if these gardens are allowed either to be given up, or to fall into private hands."

Narrator: Happily, the shortfall in investment was eventually made up and the gardens finally opened for business on the 08 th of July 1840. However, they were troubled financially for much of the rest of their existence and the restrictions on Sunday opening were not fully resolved until they were taken into private ownership in 1848.

A letter in the Leeds Mercury by the proprietor, Edward Baines, outlines the issues behind the controversy.

Voice #9: "You bring together a crowd of people, of both sexes and ages, without any means of rendering the company select. I need not say that the vilest characters as well as the most frivolous, worldly and worthless are more abroad on the Sabbath than on any other day. Here you offer them a public attraction which concentrates them in one place. You gather them out of the streets, out of the highways and hedges, and bring them to a focus. If they shall have bought tickets you cannot refuse them admission. I do not know that you can exclude abandoned females ... See the kind of company into which our youth are likely to be thrown on the afternoon of the Sabbath as a means of improving their morals and cultivating their piety."

Narrator: Not everyone in Leeds, was quite so reactionary though, as the following epistle to the Leeds Intelligencer makes clear.

Voice#10: " ... the supposed degenerating influence of opening these Gardens on Sundays, is, I am afraid, based on a spirit of which we have an excess in Leeds, and in consequence are deprived of our share of the legitimate and rational enjoyments of life. If they call it irreligion, what is irreligion? In Germany, for instance, (where, perhaps, more leisure for Sunday recreation exists than I should be willing to advocate), how does it affect the people? Are their hearts more hardened, the disposition for immorality more awakened, or the occurrences of crime more frequent than in this country, and if not, to what extent can the letter of the Bible be infringed upon? I must not extend on this subject. I know it is not agreeable to many to read. As to the Gardens, there can be no doubt but that there has been too much restriction upon them."

Narrator: It is time to move on. Cross the street, and head back to Cardigan Road. Turn left when you reach it and keep on walking down the road, until you reach the Bear Pit. You'll know it when you see it. It's the building on your left that looks like a miniature castle.

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Stop #7

Narrator: We are now at the Bear Pit. This is perhaps the most obvious and well-known part of the Gardens still remaining. A contemporary plan of the site indicates that it once stood on the shore of an ornamental lake, while accounts by visitors suggest that a pair of eagles were housed in the barred enclosures on either side of the arched gate. The pit itself was home to at least two different bears during the course of the Garden's short existence. The bear pit was left, for many years, in a state of disrepair, but it was restored in 1966 by Leeds Civic Trust to something like its former glory.

The website Britishlistedbuildings.co.uk describes the bearpit in the following terms:

Voice #11: Rock-faced rusticated masonry. Two circular castellated turrets with round-arched entrance in left and right returns, linked by a wall with Venetian-type gateway, vousoirs to central round arch. On the East side, the circular bear pit is brick-lined and is linked to the turret wall by two tunnels; on the West side a paved area and low retaining wall, curved at ends ... The bears were viewed from the top of the turrets.

Narrator: The bear pit is no longer a safe place for visitors. In recent years, the top of the pit has been used by rough sleepers as a temporary home. It has become much overgrown with nettles and brambles and there are no railings to prevent intrepid explorers from falling in. But in the Garden's heyday, it would have been possible to climb the spiral staircases to the viewing platform at the top and look down upon the pit's hairy inhabitant in the circular, brick-lined arena below.

The bear: You didn't expect that did you? A talking bear? Well why not – you've come to see me dance haven't you ... so why wouldn't I also be able to talk? I have some questions for you.

What kind of bear am I? Black, Brown? No, you can't tell by the colour of my fur. Anyway, it's a bit dark down here. Even when the sun is shining. You up there, in the bright light, your eyes can't adjust quickly enough to see the details.

It's the paws you need to look at. The tracks of a brown bear are distinguished by the alignment of the toes on the front paw – and long claws. Black bears have short nails which help when climbing trees. You see – they've put a tree stump here in the middle of the pit – so that I can amuse you by climbing it – but I can't. I'm a brown bear – so all I can do is use it to keep my claws sharp. But at least they don't throw dogs in here to torment me. That wouldn't please the delicate ladies you see – and it would be too - Elizabethan.

What would I really like to eat? Well - small children obviously ... ha, ha! This bear has a sense of humour. You'd have to really ... to spend your life in this place. I would like to eat fresh salmon, that I have plucked out of the running water myself. Here you throw all sort of things at me – oranges, bread. Stones. I can't eat stones.

What's my name? Some call me Bruin – but I have many names all over the world and in many different times – Misha, when I am the mascot of the Russian Olympic team. Teddy is most popular today – after Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt, the American President. But I am not a cuddly toy. If I could get out of this pit, you would not like to cuddle me.

I have a cousin. Let's call her Rosie. Another good name for a bear. The last I heard she was doing a similar job to mine in Wakefield, at the Orangery. They kept raising the walls of the pit ... but she was strong ... or just very bored - and therefore cross ... she got out. It didn't end well. There were some injuries I believe, to the gardener's wife. And then ... to my cousin, who was shot.

Poor Rosie. Her body was sold to a local hotel and she was served and eaten. I have heard it said that the flesh of a bear is delicious. But I wouldn't care to speculate.

Now it's your turn. Because of course I can see you. Very smart. Though you look ... small. And trapped ... Ladies – you can hardly breathe against the whalebones in your corsets. And your legs all tied up with hoops. Gentlemen, you are all so hot in this summer heat. All wrapped up in your waistcoats and cravats. Who is in prison here?

No ... since you ask, I don't know where I come from. I was taken away very young, so I can't remember – I could have been born anywhere from Alaska down to the coast of California – or on the Russian coast of the Bering Sea. These people who own the Pleasure Garden – they don't know and I'm sure they don't care either. I have been bought and sold and bought again. I suppose, one day, I'll be shot and turned into a rug for some gentleman to stand upon in front of his fire, while he smokes a cigar. But not today.

Not as long as you keep paying your money, to walk around this Garden, showing off your nice clothes – and coming to visit me – just so you can tell your friends you saw me dance. Except I'm not dancing. I'm trying to get free of these chains.

Narrator: Time to move on now. Let's leave the bear behind. Carry on walking down Cardigan Road. Keep going, until you reach the junction with Victoria Road. Swing left and walk past the mock-Tudor mansion, until you reach the mossy ginnel, just before the bus stop.

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Stop #8

Narrator: Here we are at the bottom of the little ginnel that runs down to the bus stop on Victoria Road. The old stone wall that runs along the length of the ginnel, is part of the exterior wall of the Gardens. If you look across the road, you can see where the wall continues, vanishing into the terraces beyond.

As you have already heard, the Gardens were always underfunded and struggled financially from the start. Indeed, by 1848, the Gardens Committee felt that they were no longer viable and the land was put up for sale.

Voice #12: To the Editor of the Leeds Times. Sir, - On Monday week, the sale of the Leeds Zoological Gardens took place, and John Smith, Esq, of Burley House, was the purchaser. For whatever purpose they were purchased, whether for general building-ground or for private use, is not my business to enquire, but I hope not to be considered intruding upon privacy of intentions by suggesting that a general public sympathy, supported by a list of voluntary subscribers, might yet save Leeds from a lamentable loss, scarcely to be remedied by the present generation." *Cato. Leeds Times 30th December 1848*

Narrator: The writer of this letter had clearly given some serious thought to the Garden's commercial prospects. In an earlier piece of correspondence, he laid out the following suggestions for improvements.

Voice #13: The refreshment department has so far, comparatively, done little or nothing for the shareholders, while I contend that the chief resources must come from that department. Give admittance tickets at the door for sixpence, subject to exchange in the Gardens for refreshment; let these refreshments be varied, good, and as reasonable as any good house in Leeds would provide, and the bait will prove irresistible. An average taking of 1s to 1s 6 a head is within a reasonable calculation; and on a gala day, of from 10 to 15,000 people, alone sufficient to cover half the expenses for the whole year, And why should there not be half-a-dozen galas? Why should not the Leeds and Thirsk Railway bring a few hundred customers every fine summer's evening? But ginger-beer and penny buns people are tired of. If the public once find it out that comforts are provided for them, season tickets, at the rate of half-a-crown, might be disposed of for the number of thousands, and secure a regular and well-paying business.

Narrator: Cato also advocated the management of the Gardens being overseen by a single investor, rather than by committee. This is what eventually came to pass. The land was bought from John Smith by Henry Cowper Marshall – one of the original shareholders – and the lease for the management of the gardens was taken up by Thomas Clapham, a local entrepreneur.

Headingley historian, Eveleigh Bradford, has spent some time researching Clapham's life.

Eveleigh: A distinctive lively figure, tall, red-haired, and sporting tight check trousers, Tommy Clapham was a popular character in Victorian Leeds. Thirty years old, and bursting with fresh ideas, he was confident he could make a success of the financially ailing Gardens.

Originally from Keighley, he was drawn to Leeds by the opportunities offered by the growing town. When the new Leeds-Thirsk railway opened in 1849, linking Leeds with Harrogate and Ripon and passing right by the Burley end of the Gardens, he knew at once that his chance had come. He set himself up as a railway excursion agent, took on the lease of the Gardens, changed the name to 'The Royal Gardens', and switched the emphasis of the attraction to popular entertainment and fun. Tommy's gardens were full of spectacle: monkeys whose antics made people laugh, firework displays, balloon ascents, military bands, spectacular galas – all at a lower entrance price to bring the crowds in. He tried everything, but even he could not make the Gardens pay, and ten years later, in 1858, he was forced to close. Even the elderly bear was auctioned off, with the lawnmowers and other equipment.

Narrator: Time to move on now. Take a moment to check the traffic on the road ahead. When it is clear, make your way across and walk down Norwood Terrace, the street directly opposite the bus stop. After you've walked about twenty feet, take the first right into Back Norwood Terrace, where you'll come across the Garden's boundary wall again.

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Stop #9

Narrator: Here we are in Back Norwood Terrace. On one side of the little street are redbrick terraced houses, while on the other side is the boundary wall of the Gardens, overgrown, in several places, by ferns and other foliage. Take a moment to find a safe place to stand. Be aware that the street is residential and that it is sometimes used as a thoroughfare for cars.

As you have already heard, Tommy Clapham's Royal Gardens closed in 1858. Even with Clapham's showmanship behind them, the Gardens continued to be something of a financial black hole. However, this is not to say that they did not make a positive contribution to city life or that Tommy's tenure as their manager was without its high points. Indeed, there are records of many exciting events taking place during his time as proprietor.

Voice #14: Grand Balloon Ascent! Next Monday October the 15th, 1855, in honour of the fall of Sebastopol! A young lady will ascend in the balloon, "Victory," which will be piloted by the venerable aeronaut, Capt. Chambers. The inflation of the balloon will commence near the bottom of the Gardens in the morning, will be continued in the large grass-plot (near the platform) in the afternoon, and will ascend with the above intrepid voyageurs exactly at 4:15 P.M.

Narrator: The balloon ascent was not the only spectacular entertainment provided. One performer at the Royal Gardens, who was very familiar to Leeds audiences, was Pablo Fanque, a famous Victorian Equestrian and a man who is thought to have been Britain's first non-white circus owner. Pablo performed in many arresting extravaganzas over the years and has condescended to give us a short account of his experiences.

Pablo: Roll up, roll up, roll up ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! Right, errr... erm. Situated in the leafy and wooded suburb of Headingley, we invite you to enjoy the best arranged and most exquisite botanical wonders, and at a modest extra charge, also enjoy the most spectacular gymnastic and equestrian entertainment in the land - all at the "beautiful and princely" - Leeds Royal Gardens!

Where is he the lazy little...? Leaving me to do all the (cough)... wait till I.. He gets paid! Oh, aye! Never a thing when I was training up. I always ensure they get something, apprentices, even when times are hard. Treats on Sundays, after church.

Hope he's not been pinched! Didn't put all that work in for another ringmaster to... thank your pardon very much! I wonder if he's been told... or heard? Well, it'll soon come out... I'm facing bankruptcy charges, here in Leeds, some time in '59.

I feel upbeat though, I do, being here... you see – the Leeds Zoological and Botanical Society also faced bankruptcy, not a pleasant thing, but look at it now! Here it is, transformed - into Leeds Royal Gardens! There's hope to be had. Saying that, the current owner's on his knees too, bless him, but that's between you and me right now.

My wife Susannah would've loved all this. Splendid botanical varieties, from all over world and not too far from where she's buried... in Woodhouse. Stupendous displays like this allow us to appreciate nature in all it's variety. Ancients saw nature all around and created stories... about the stars too; all different and magnificent in their own twinkling glory, yet all a part of the whole.

Round these parts we attribute flowers for supremacy, don't we? Like the rose - which is best, the red or the white? (Smiles) That was a long time ago mind. I live in Lancashire and here I am, loved in Yorkshire, as it should be.

Biggest challenge of my life, coping without her. Book keepin' ha'nt been same since! A tragic accident, on Headrow. Seating collapsed onto box office, in '48, trapping our Susannah. Some bugger stole night's takings and wedding ring right off her finger as she lay dying. Never held it against Yorkshire though. I'll join her, here in Leeds, when it's my time to end up in soil.

Maybe that's our fascination with the beauty of botany, 'cos we become part of what makes 'em grow! We help make world a better more beautiful place when we've left this mortal coil. Aye, but we don't have to wait.

Six year after Susannah, I returned to Leeds – bigger an' better - wi' largest company of equestrians in land, from all nations: Europe, Asia, Africa, America. Audiences love diversity in circus – like botany and constellations – it's what we're about, it's literally all around us! But... so much evil out there, brazenly expressing their inhumanity toward others.

Sickening darker forces are called dark for that's where they thrive. Some plants have to be exposed to light to stop 'em germinating, so they don't grow to endanger us. Other plants are exposed to destruction merely due to their hue. American, Frederick Douglass, famously said slavery is a thing that is best exposed to light.

He made abolition speech in Wakefield in '46, same night I performed there: two darkies in one small town, different venues, full houses! Ha. Slavery on one side, abolished in West Indies but carrying on in America – and on t'other side – progress.

Though Norwich born, I started my circus in Wakefield, back in 18... 35. I were a sapling, properly nurtured into a trade, I drank up all skills poured my way; paid my dues and got my own rig. All young ones want these days is to black up their faces and play minstrel shows – dance and sing like black folk,

for laughs and money. ... British slavery might be over but pushback, by darker forces, always seems to follow progress.

Are the days of skilful and sophisticated spectacles truly gone? Just few year ago I could boast - Miss Smith's daring and electrifying Act D'Equitation - leaping over canvasses and through hoops on her rapid steed; you could see 'The Equestrian Marvel of the Age' – General Tom Thumb; see Mademoiselle Adeline appear in her grand historical act of horsemanship as Jean D'Arc - in combat with three horsemen! We had philosophical clowns and Shakespearean revels for social commentary - increasingly all too challenging for today's dwindling crowds. Ah, but mimic a negro – and watch ticket sales soar!

That young lad's a talented minstrel... even I laugh, genuinely, I do. But imagine, working for no pay to build up another land, another's economy – one generation after another, unpaid and brutalised for hundreds of years – and then be mimicked for world to laugh at!

Perhaps the lad doesn't want to be an equestrian clown. What if he'll never understand? Will the people of Leeds become better human beings through these global botanic wonders in Headingley? Will Britain ever stop dehumanising? Or does all this just simply boil down to Pablo Fanque being his big dreamer self and the young lad's accepted a better offer elsewhere?

Oh, Susannah! (Takes deep breath.) Smell those flowers! (Fully exhales). Aye, I'll bring some for yer tomorrow. Shhhh! Now, let's get ready eh... for, the greatest show... on earth – must go on!

Narrator: Time to move on. Carry on walking down the street and turn left at the end, back into Norwood Terrace. Then turn right and keep walking until you reach the junction with Cardigan Lane. Turn right again and then walk on, until you reach the Co-Op on the far side of Cardigan Road. Helpfully there is crossing directly in front of the supermarket's forecourt.

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Stop #10

Narrator: Here we are outside the Co-Op. We are almost at the end of our time together. As you listen keep your eyes peeled for traffic and carry on walking down Cardigan Lane, until you find yourself back at Burley Park Station. Of course, the Zoological and Botanical Gardens are long gone now, but they made quite an impact on the development of the area and they enriched the lives of the people of Victorian Leeds. While they may not have been as successful as the various people who invested in them hoped, for the brief period of their existence, they offered “rational recreation” to the busy populace and provided an idyllic (and occasionally spectacular) alternative to the dirty streets of the industrial city.

Here is a description of the Gardens in their heyday. It is taken from the Leeds Mercury’s report on their opening in 1840.

Voice #15: Surrounded by a high wall within which on the west, south and east, is a plantation of trees in proper botanical arrangement, and on the north are fruit trees trained against a wall. Beautiful slopes of grass, tasteful parterres and shrubberies, with winding walks, two very handsome ponds with islands and a beautiful fountain. Near the entrance to the grounds from Headingley is a conservatory containing a beautiful collection of geraniums and a variety of exotic plants and flowers.

Narrator: Of course, green spaces are still important to city dwellers today. To end our walk, we’re going to hear some words from Carol Sorhaindo, a textile artist, whose work considers our connection to the natural world.

Carol: My name is Carol Sorhaindo. I am an artist with an interest in the roots and routes of plants and stories which link Britain and the Caribbean.

I am talking to you from the sunny island of Dominica. I am transported back to my many walks along the tree lined Cardigan Road, past the mysterious arched entrance of the bear pit, long forgotten and strangled by brambles and ivy.

As a black person living in the UK it is important to find cultural experiences which make one feel rooted and connected. I think if I was walking through Leeds Botanical Gardens I would have been drawn to something which reminded me of the sun. Stop and look around for a moment. What plants are you drawn to?

The story of British botanical gardens is a global one. An assemblage of roots and branches so tightly woven together they are difficult to disentangle. They emphasise the rich biodiversity of the British landscape and bring to light entangled and suppressed narratives.

It is ironic that words such as Diaspora and Transplantation both have botanic roots. Diaspora meaning a scattering of seeds and Transplantation to plant across.

The Victorians loved their gardens. Plants played a central role in Britain's Industrial Revolution and colonial expansion, as new fresh foods and fascinating new species were introduced to Britain from foreign lands. With the Industrial Revolution also came new concepts of nature and science; one that viewed nature as inferior to mankind. This view also fed into Victorian notions of race and culture.

The Slavery Abolition Act was passed in the UK in 1833, but many British companies were still heavily invested in the ongoing trade and were complicit in the enslavement of people around the world. It is shocking to think that at the time of the Garden's creation, black bodies were also being shipped across oceans, in tightly packed and inhumane conditions, treated like commodities, sometimes on the same journey as the plants. Each plant would be carefully prepared and packed for shipping in small glass cabinets known as 'Wardian Cases', to ensure their healthy survival on the rough sea journeys. Even more care and attention would be taken in the transplantation process to protect their fragile root systems. Glasshouses were built for acclimatization after arrival in their new foreign home. Transplanted Africans were not accorded such careful treatment.

How important are our roots today? What happens when roots are broken? How do we feed, protect and nurture our roots to ensure healthy growth and a stable footing?

With the 70th year anniversary of the 'Empire Windrush' being celebrated in 2018, Brexit, the recent George Floyd murder and Black lives Matter protests across the world this year, the subject of rootedness and cultural connection is even more poignant. Covid 19 has brought even more challenges with restrictions on our freedom to socialize, to travel and with concerns for our physical and mental wellbeing. At the same time, it has offered a time to stop, reflect, take nature walks and breathe.

We are increasingly made aware that spending time in the green outdoors actually promotes better psychological and physical wellbeing.

The original plan drawings for the gardens show a very grand vision which included an orangery, conservatories for tropical fruit plants, palms, geraniums and other exotic plants. We know this was scaled down and the buildings were probably never realized.

We may never know exactly what plants rooted in this space, but we can play with our imaginations and apply the Victorian interests in plant symbolism to our lives. Geraniums are sun loving plants found in mountains of the tropics and parts of South Africa. They bring fragrance and colour to a garden with

their bright blooms. They were thought to symbolize civility and positive emotions. Palms suited the Victorian appeal for the exotic. They represented wealth, status and victory over adversity.

Local people say that there are still remnants of some of the original planting. Street names such as Oak Villa and The Cedars may provide some clues. Today an old weeping silver birch and rowan trees are visible in the area. Birch is a European species often seen as a tree of hope and new beginnings. Rowan, in European folklore, symbolizes life and courage.

Looking round Leeds today we see a very diverse population. We just need to nip into the local Coop on Cardigan Road to see bananas, coconuts, pineapples, oranges, mangoes, limes which have become our daily bread. With new cultures come new experiences, greater global awareness and hopefully change for a more understanding and caring world.

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